

Moravian Pottery and Tile Works  
(Henry Chapman Mercer Tile Works)  
southwest side of State Route 313  
(Swamp Road), 0.2 mile northwest  
of East Court Street  
Doylestown vicinity  
Bucks County  
Pennsylvania

5381  
HABS No. PA-~~1220~~

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MORAVIAN POTTERY AND TILE WORKS  
(HENRY CHAPMAN MERCER TILE WORKS)

HABS No. PA- 5381

Location: Southwest side of State Route 313 (Swamp Road), 0.2 mile northwest of East Court Street, Doylestown vicinity, Bucks County, Pennsylvania

Present Use Museum

Significance Designed by anthropologist and antiquarian Henry Chapman Mercer as a factory to reproduce the decorative pottery and tile of the Pennsylvania-Germans. The product produced was noted for its quality and craftsmanship. Architecturally, the building is a pioneering example of the use of reinforced concrete and is stylistically derived from the designs of the Spanish Missions of California.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1912
2. Architect: Henry Chapman Mercer (1856-1930)
3. Original and subsequent owners: Mercer purchased the property in stages from 1907-1911. Upon his death in 1930, he bequeathed the property to Frank K. Swain, who in turn willed the property to Frank H. Swain in 1954. Raymond F. Buck purchased the property in 1956, but by 1972, the property was owned by the Bucks County Government.

B. Historical Context:

Henry Chapman Mercer was an anthropologist, archeologist and antiquarian who was particularly interested in the material culture of early America and specifically of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. In 1899, he began to experiment with the production of pottery and tile, based on Moravian and Pennsylvania-German designs. His work was well received and was lauded for its high standard of craftsmanship. Indicative of the quality of his tiles, Mercer received an award for them in 1904 at the Universal Exposition at St. Louis, Missouri.

After the burning of his original pottery works at "Aldee" near Doylestown, Mercer began construction of the present factory in 1912. The works remained in operation until 1964. After remaining vacant for a time, the building is now open to the public as a museum, operated by the Bucks County Department of Parks and Recreation.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Like Mercer's home, Fonthill, and the Mercer Museum, both of which he also designed, the tile works is a pioneering example of reinforced concrete construction. Also like the aforementioned buildings, the tile works exhibits an eclectic design based on historical precedents, specifically in this case the California missions of Santa Barbara, San Juan Capistrano and San Luis Rey.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 2-1/2 stories, approximately 100' x 120'. The building is U-shaped with a 32' x 24' wing extending to the west at the northern end.
2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.
3. Walls: Tan reinforced concrete, with a rough finish which shows the marks left by the molds used in pouring the concrete. The walls are buttressed in the same material.
4. Porches, balconies: An arcaded porch, capped with a parapeted terrace, surrounds the first floor of the interior courtyard.
5. Chimneys: Concrete, brick and tile; square, octagonal and round; approximately 24 small chimneys and 7 large chimneys.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Painted board-and-batten doors with pointed arch tops.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Both rectangular and round-arched. Several of the larger windows in the display room have 2" concrete muntins. Along

the inner side of the courtyard, the removable wooden sash windows are generally 40" wide by 24" high (12 lights) and have 6"-inch wooden hand grips on the interior for easy removal. The interior sills of these windows have a 4"-wide trough with a 7"-high interior lip, all of concrete.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Generally a gable roof with a rounded top composed of 10" to 12" of reinforced concrete with brushed concrete surface. Towers have pyramidal and bell-shaped roofs covered with tiles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Gable ends terminate in Jacobean gables. Cornices are moulded concrete with two fillets above and an ovolo below,
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Two 10' x 10' towers at the northeastern and northwestern corners. Concrete exterior stairway leads up from second-floor terrace to western tower.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: A U-shaped series of nine connected workrooms and one office, with a display room wing at the northwestern corner.
- b. Second floor: Repeats pattern of the first floor.

2. Stairways: Four reinforced concrete stairways. One wooden ladder leading to the water storage tanks in the east tower.
3. Flooring: Reinforced concrete with cement plaster finish.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Reinforced concrete, with walls generally 5" thick. Rough finish shows marks from molds used to pour the concrete. Ceilings are rough groin vaults on the first floor and underside of gable roof on second floor.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Wooden tongue and groove and panel doors.

6. Decorative features and trim: Numerous tiles are set into the walls of the showroom, particularly surrounding the large fireplace.

7. Hardware: Wooden doors have wooden sliding latches.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: Small tube radiators. Showroom fireplace is 10' x 6'-6" x 5'-4".

b. Lighting: Electric.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The factory is located northeast of the center of Doylestown. The two wings of the U-shaped structure extend in a generally north-south direction.

2. Outbuildings: There is a reinforced concrete garage-shed 40' north of the factory.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

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Sias, Elizabeth H., "Mercer's Moravian Pottery and Tile Works," The Historian, Bucks County Historical Society, Vol. II, no. 6 (Spring, 1963), pp. 41-42.

"Tile Resources in Surface Embellishment," The Architectural Record, Vol. XXXVI, no. 5, (Nov., 1914), pp. 421-430.

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